



Kids succeed more easily with a boost from music

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What makes a child fall in love with a certain musical instrument?

No one is quite sure. It's a combination of sound, appearance, circumstance and the same kind of emotional alchemy that hits when you fall in romantic love.

One thing is certain, however: If your child never gets to see and hear musical instruments, he or she may never have the opportunity to fall in love with one — and that would be a shame. Musical chemistry starts early. Some children, like young Seattle violinist Yuri Nankung, start as early as 2; most of the famous prodigies who grow up into adult artists — such as violinist Midori and cellist Yo-Yo Ma — fell in love with their instruments before they started school.

Not every child is going to be gripped by music in the way that oboist Alex Klein was. The Brazilian-born virtuoso, who formerly taught at the University of Washington and now is principal oboe of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, went to an orchestral concert as a grade-schooler and announced to his startled parents, "I want to play that one in the middle."

Doing so meant a daylong bus ride from Klein's small-town home to the nearest big city each week, followed by a daylong bus ride home — an arduous schedule that later bore fruit in a series of musical prizes, awards and international opportunities.

Few children are miniature Alex Kleins, in terms of commitment and ability. But every child deserves a chance to see whether musical instruments will ignite a spark that may have lifelong positive implications.

Why bother studying music?

The weight of increasing scientific evidence, for one thing, is underscoring a point that teachers have long known; music instruction makes you

do better in school. It also may actually make you smarter. Research at the University of California at Irvine has focused on actual developmental changes in the brain that arise from very early (preschool) music lessons. And mere exposure (listening) to classical music prior to the administering of IQ tests has been shown to improve IQ scores.

In February, a study reported in the journal *Neurological Research* detailed the results of a two-year experiment with preschoolers, led by psychologist Frances Rauscher of the University of Wisconsin at Oshkosh and physicist Gordon Shaw of the University of California at Irvine. The experiment included three groups of children: One group received piano and singing lessons, a second group received private computer lessons and a third group received no training.

The children who received piano training performed 34 percent higher on tests measuring spatial-temporal ability than the others. The researchers concluded that piano instruction is "far superior to computer instruction in dramatically enhancing children's abstract reasoning skills necessary for math and science."

These results reinforce the link between music and intelligence and suggest the importance of developing certain neural links — circuitry, if you will — that are used for abstract reasoning and the understanding of mathematical concepts. (Check out UCI's Music and Science Information Computer Archive, or "MuSICA," website at <http://www.musica.uci.edu>.)

Some tests and studies suggest that even earlier musical influences may reap significant rewards. Sister Lorna Zemke, a Wisconsin professor of music, contends that "Children that are stimulated by music in the prenatal state are immediately recognizable by their advanced skills in socialization, verbalization and overall alertness." In studies at Brigham Young University, premature babies who were exposed to classical music gained more weight, cried less, were healthier and left the hospital an average of three days earlier than babies not exposed to classical music.

There are other benefits from accumulated music instruction. According to statistics in The College Board's "Profiles of SAT and Achievement Test Takers," students who studied the arts four or more years scored 59 points higher on verbal and 44 points higher on math portions of the SAT than students with no experience in the arts.

Students who study music also learn fine points of hand-eye coordination; they also learn what is essentially a foreign language, the language of musical notation. They learn that you can start out knowing absolutely nothing about, say, the clarinet and end up making real music by the end of the school year.

Unlike sports, which also encourages group participation and personal achievement, music is a group activity in which there are no winners or losers. Everyone learns, literally, to play together in an endeavor where no one keeps score.

For teenagers who are suffering from low self-esteem and high stress, music participation can be a saving grace — a way to unwind constructively and to let loose feelings that can't be expressed in other ways. At an age where peers mean everything, a constructive group activity such as making music also can be socially beneficial.

"We've turned into such a nation of spectators," says John DeJarnatt, Seattle Symphony player and an active teacher, "but music can make people into participants and give them a greatly enriched adult life. Ask anybody who plays in an amateur orchestra: The rewards of doing it even sort of well can be tremendous.

2

“Along the way, you learn discipline and time management. The top players in the outstanding school orchestra programs, such as Garfield High

School’s, are top students as well, going on to universities like Yale and Harvard. And the social bonds in bands and orchestras can become very strong.”

Once you do have an aspiring young instrumentalist around the house, parents can help immeasurably even if they don’t have musical training. Finding a quiet place to practice and setting up a regular time is a major help in establishing a practice schedule. Parents also should provide positive encouragement instead of wincing at mistakes and should urge youngsters to play for family and friends if they want to. This also is a good time to start taking your child to concerts if you don’t already and to encourage regular listening to good music.

From those efforts at practicing, lifelong lessons can be learned. (Furman) -President Clinton calls music “representative of everything I like most in life. It’s beautiful and fun, but very rigorous. If you wanted to be good, you had to work like crazy. It was a real relationship between effort and reward.

“My musical life experiences were just as important to me, in terms of forming my development, as my political experiences or my academic life.”



BETTY UDESEN / SEATTLE TIMES

Seattle violinist Yuri Namkung took up music when she was 2 years old. Studies suggest that early exposure to music is beneficial.